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Title of paper: “Cambridge Prostitution and the Rules Governing the University Spinning House in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century”

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to analyse the situation of prostitution in Cambridge and its regulation by the middle of the nineteenth century based on archival research. Cambridge University was characterised at the time by being a singular institution regarding its relationship with town and with the application of its own norms within its jurisdiction. As a consequence, the University of Cambridge had its own system of regulation of prostitution through a proctorial system within its boundaries and with a place of detention for prostitutes known as the Spinning House. In this place, located in Hobson's Charity, St. Andrew's Street, fallen women were confined for a number of days as a way of punishment for their immoral activity. In this University prison, women were detained under unsalubrious conditions which, on some occasions, ended in the illness or premature death of some of the inmates. In particular, I am going to focus this paper on the close scrutiny of the “Rules for the Government of the Spinning House” of 1849 and 1854, which include the regulation of the inmates' behaviour together with their diet. Also the rules that applied to the Matron, the Chaplain and the Medical Officer will be discussed in the light of some census data and prison records. As a result, a number of issues concerning the treatment of Cambridge prostitutes by University authorities can be discerned. Also the dreadful consequences of the system and the implication of different social agents can be examined through the close reading of these primary sources.